

# A CARMEN FROM REAL LIFE FOR OUR OPERA

Beautiful Nineteen-Year-Old Supervia Conchita Has Lived the Opera of Bizet—  
Campanini's Grand Bouquet of Lovely Women



Supervia Conchita.



Marie Kousnezoff.



Maria Barrientos.

CLEOPONTE CAMPANINI rushed to Barcelona.

When he rushed back to Paris he had beauty's own self with him—Carmen in the flesh, and only 19!

"The grand bouquet is composed," said the director of the Chicago-Philadelphia-New York Grand Opera organization, who sees beyond the eyebrows of Supervia Conchita. In his mind's eye he beholds the greatest collection of lovely women ever gathered for a single opera company—Maria Barrientos, Louise Edvina, Marie Kousnezoff, Edith Walker, Irene Jonani, Rosa Raisa, Alice Zeppilli, Amy Evans—all for Chicago!

He told me so himself. None of us was listening. We just saw Supervia Conchita in that parlor of the Grand Hotel of Paris. Ah! the cheeks, the eyes, the smile of Supervia.

A find! A world find! The hardened photographer was upset in her presence. She looked up with that smile as from signing a fat contract. Piff! The flashlight caught but loveliness. The crude, hard magnesium flash which older women dread caught only dimples, curves and satiny skin. The photographer stood stunned. I babbled of green fields. The secretary began writing his own name furiously on the typewriter. Only Campanini, brushing his forehead wearily with his hand, possessed himself and smiled superior. He had attained a great ambition. This was its last touch.

For years he kept it hidden in his heart. Some day, he knew not when, he would become the general director of a great operatic enterprise. And then—he knew that it would come—he was determined to unite to his ideals of singing, orchestra and scenery a complete bouquet of beauty.

"Ah! beauty," exclaims Campanini: "beautiful feminine faces and figures—

do you not express to the eyes the beautiful temperaments within you in triple harmony with your beautiful voices?"

How many times, in his younger years, conducting orchestras for other managers, he mourned that beauty did not dominate the whole. On becoming general director of the Chicago Grand Opera Company, with a free hand at last, he began to study to surround himself with beautiful stars.

He is convinced that external beauty has an intimate bearing on the talent of the woman artist. When the beautiful woman has a beautiful voice the voice is more beautiful and the woman more lovely. And beauty educates temperament. Without temperament the voice is a look without a blush, a kiss without a scare, says Campanini.

All of which is easy to explain—and difficult to attain. The beauties have engagements. For example, the lovely Marie Kousnezoff, idol of St. Petersburg and London, has never had time in her short life to see the Statue of Liberty. Signing her this year was possible only because, at Campanini's great desire, she had left the time open for three months in Chicago, Philadelphia and New York in making her European dates. She sings all the roles of the modern French repertory and has been specially engaged to replace Mary Garden. Campanini is convinced indeed that in her he has the only European artist who could replace her—and Kousnezoff has beauty to burn.

Or take Edith Walker, an American beauty abroad whom Campanini had his eyes on. But she was such a favorite in Germany that it was possible to sign her only this summer. She is engaged

to sing "Electra" at the Paris Grand Opera in March next, under the new Rouche direction. Richard Strauss will himself conduct.

Only those who have seen Campanini rushing about Europe this summer can have an idea of the labor of it. Within a month after arriving in Paris he made a trip to Italy; returned and did that flying voyage to Barcelona; then back to Paris, into Germany, and once more back to Paris—all in four weeks. He was on his way to London the day after we photographed his Conchita.

I think that he hated to leave her in Paris; but there is a rope tied to her ankle, and an honest man holds it. Edvina was in London; and she may have needed roping. In Paris, where she made a furor this spring, at the new Champs Elysees Opera House, they call Edvina the carved gem beauty, so clean cut yet rounded are her lines, so pure her features.

And Maria Barrientos was also in London, where she had just finished a triumph in concert. This famous Spanish coloratura singer is like a luscious peach with the bloom on. Few women in the world dress so well. Once a country youth coming up to Seville became so enamored of her that he refused to return home. He just sat and drank in the beauty of Maria, every night she sang, until the effects became visible.

The boy was changed. He dropped his uncouthness; his rustic ways gave place to suave urbanity; and intelligence illuminated his young face like a gourd with a candle inside. Going into copper speculation (Rio Tinto) he was rich in six months. Only then did he

throw himself at the feet of Maria Barrientos; and when she gently refused his addresses he said that it was all right, that to have studied her was in itself a liberal education.

Speaking of these things, Campanini expressed his conviction:

"When I see an artist I look if she is beautiful. If yes, it is 60 per cent, gained in advance. The time is past when those big women (the maestro extended his arms wide) could stand in front of the prompter's box and roll off a song."

I asked him, "What are Americans so infatuated with beauty?" He said, "yes, the mass of the American people are young and fresh enough not only to love beauty but to demand it. They have not got to the point of 'mummified virtuosity,' where the personal appearance of even a grand artist is immaterial. The woman singer who is beautiful has already made her way 60 per cent, with Americans before she opens her mouth."

Rosa Raisa is just out of her teens. In the first year of her career her flashing Polish beauty took her to sing in Parma, the most difficult city of Italy; in Chicago, Philadelphia, in London and in Paris on two great stages, the Grand Opera and the new opera House of the Champs Elysees, all in the same first year!

Irene Jonani is an American, a denizen of Chicago, who appears for the first time in her native land after a sensational tour of Italian cities. Who could doubt the power of beauty in her case, as Campanini says, "so typical"? Italy is overrun with native coloratura sopranos; and it takes a real flower to triumph.

Vice versa, Alice Zeppilli is an Italian favorite of America for the same reason.

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